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FOOTPRINTS

The tree-garden of Mehrdar

Master Khadim Hussain calls this labour of love '*Gulzar-i-Bakulo*', or 'Garden of Senior Citizens', after the men who came together to plant it

By Muhammad Akbar Notezai in Quetta

KHADIM Hussain

WITH winter setting in across the valley, the nights have turned a little frigid.

On the eastern side of the city, near the mountains of the Koh-i-Mehrdar, lies Marriabad — a Hazara neighbourhood located just outside the cantonment's boundary walls.

Men and women from the Hazara community can be seen there walking in the evenings, as it is a popular spot for hiking.

Others also frequent the vicinity, to escape the otherwise mundane and hectic city life.

At the foot of the mighty Mehrdar peaks, stands Master Khadim Hussain's garden of trees, which he has tended virtually single-handedly for years.

Entering this 'urban forest' and walking through the trees and plants he has planted, one can feel the air growing pleasantly cool.

When we visit, Hussain is resting on a narrow Persian rug in the middle of his garden, clad in shalwar-kameez and a blue jacket.

"Master" is a euphemism used in Balochistan for teachers, as Hussain is a 66-year-old retired schoolteacher.

In his own words, he is "66 years young", because most of his friends who helped plant these trees have either passed away, or are too old to work now.

Hussain is left now alone to tend to the garden, which he treats "like my children," he tells *Dawn*.

A father of six, two of his children live abroad. Hussain himself recently returned from Finland, where he spent three months with his daughter, who is also a teacher.

"During Musharraf's rule, some 17 or 18 years ago, a tube well was set up over here," he recalls, while pointing to towards the end of the treeline.

"So we, a group of 15 Hazaras, came up with idea of planting trees as volunteers to fight climate change even though Balochistan has no role in causing it, since there are hardly any industries here," he adds.

"I was the youngest among them, and I agreed to join them as well because I was involved in social work too. So I started planting trees after being given one connection from the tube well."

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, it claimed the lives of five of Hussain's elderly colleagues.

He can recall their names on his fingertips — those who were at the forefront of the initiative — and it is in their honour that he has called this bastion of calm '*Gulzar-i-Bakulo*', or 'Garden of Senior Citizens'.

When asked why they chose to plant trees here, away from the main settlements of Quetta, Hussain recounts the tragic story behind the idea.

"Ten years ago, when Hazara killings were at their worst, our community became ghetto-ised into Marriabad and Hazara Town."

He notes that some parts of the Quetta had become a "no-go area" for the Hazara community.

"So we came up with idea to create this place so that our people could come out of the ghetto, breathe fresh air, and find mental relief."

He says that he loves the trees and the mountains beside them and also it's a place where there is calm.

"I spend my days here, from 10 in the morning till 8 in the evening. I don't need doctors. I've never been ill. The garden keeps me healthy."

He has other reasons to spend most of his time with the trees, including the seven cats he is taking care of, away from the human settlements.

This summer, before leaving for Finland, he entrusted the garden to his friends, asking them to water it in his absence.

"They promised they would," he says. "But when I returned, I found some of the trees dry. They had come only for a few days. The garden was abandoned."

After a brief silence, he nostalgically recalls his past: "I am 66 now, but I've had an unhappy childhood. My parents divorced when I was young, and both remarried. I was their only son, and they left me. I started life from nothing, without even a roof over my head."

He adds: "I got up on my feet. Today, I water these plants to give shelter to people and birds that come here."

Once again, after a moment's silence, Hussain wonders who will take care of his garden once he is no more.

High courts split on single-judge role in accountability cases

IHC mandates division benches for NAB cases, contradicts LHC ruling

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has ruled that all matters arising under the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), 1999, must be heard by division benches, an interpretation that directly contradicts a ruling from the Rawalpindi bench of the Lahore High Court (LHC).

The LHC bench held earlier this year that such cases should ordinarily be heard by a single judge.

The IHC's detailed order, authored by Justice Mohammed Azam Khan in a criminal appeal, elaborates the constitutional and statutory basis for assigning National Accountability Bureau (NAB)-related cases to division benches of two or more judges.

"Proceedings under the National Accountability Ordinance are not routine writs or criminal matters; they concern institutional accountability, protection of public money and constitutional guarantees of fair trial," the ruling emphasised.

The court argued that accountability proceedings involve complex constitutional and statutory questions of public importance and therefore require adjudication by more than one judge to ensure consistency, fairness, and institutional confidence.

The judgement examined Article 192 of the Constitution, which it said empowers each High Court to frame rules for distributing business between single judges and larger benches.

The IHC observed that the NAO, as a special law dealing with public office holders, falls into a category of cases with statutory intricacy or greater public consequence that warrants the scrutiny of more than one judge.

Referring to Article 192 and the Islamabad High Court (Procedure) Rules, the bench stated that the jurisdictional assignment of NAO cases to a division bench is a "constitutional safeguard intended to maintain judicial balance, avoid inconsistency, and uphold the integrity of the accountability process."

The court also addressed Section 32 of the NAO, which specifies that appeals from accountability courts must go before a division bench. It said this provision reflects the legislature's intent for higher judicial scrutiny, supporting the principle that all proceedings under the ordinance should be similarly handled.

This interpretation, however, is in direct contrast to an April ruling from the LHC's Rawalpindi bench, delivered by Justice Jawad Hassan and Justice Tariq Mahmood Bajwa.

The judges held that constitutional petitions should be heard by a single judge, citing court rules that allow it unless a law expressly mandates otherwise. They argued that Section 32 of the NAO only authorises division benches for appeals from final judgements, not for initial petitions.

They said that bypassing single judges for such petitions deprived litigants of their right to appeal and contravened Article 10A of the Constitution.

Egypt opens colossal new antiquities museum

CAIRO: Prime ministers, presidents and royalty descended on Cairo on Saturday to attend the spectacle-laden inauguration of a sprawling new billion-dollar museum built near the Pyramids to house one of the world's richest collections of antiquities.

The inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum, or GEM, marks the end of a two-decade construction effort hampered by the Arab Spring uprisings, pandemic and wars in neighbouring countries.

"We've all dreamed of this project and whether it would really come true," Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly told a press conference, calling the museum a "gift from Egypt to the whole world from a country whose history goes back more than 7,000 years".

Spectators including President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi gathered late on Saturday before an enormous screen outside the museum, which projected images of the country's most famous cultural sites as dancers in glittering pharaonic-style garb waved glowing orbs and sceptres.

'New chapter' for Egypt

They were accompanied by Egyptian pop stars and an international orchestra decked out in white beneath a sky lit with lasers, fireworks and hovering lights that formed into moving hieroglyphics.

By opening the museum, Egypt was "writing a new chapter in the story of this ancient nation's present and future," Sisi said at the opening.

The audience included German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi, and the crown princes of Oman and Bahrain.

The museum's most heavily promoted attraction is the expansive collection of treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb, uncovered in 1922, including the boy-king's golden burial mask, throne and sarcophagus, and thousands of other objects.

A colossal statue of Ramses II that sat for decades in a downtown Cairo square bearing the pharaoh's name now adorns the grand entry hall. —Reuters

Chinese president pushes for global body to govern AI

Positions Beijing as an alternative to Washington on trade cooperation

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping took centrestage at a meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) leaders on Saturday to push a proposal for a global body to govern artificial intelligence and position China as an alternative to the United States on trade cooperation.

The comments were the first by the Chinese leader on an initiative Beijing unveiled this year, while the US has rejected efforts to regulate AI in international bodies.

The Apec is a consultative forum of 21 nations representing half of global trade, including the US, China, Russia and Japan. The summit, hosted by South Korea this year, unfolded under the shadow of rising geopolitical tensions and aggressive economic strategies — ranging from US tariffs to China's export controls — that have pressured global trade.

Xi said a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation could set governance rules and boost cooperation, making AI a "public good for the international community".

In remarks published by the official news agency Xinhua, Xi added: "Artificial intelligence is of great significance for future development and should be made for the benefit of people in all countries and regions."

Chinese officials have said the organisation could be based in the commercial hub of Shanghai.

US President Donald Trump did not attend the Apec leaders' summit in the South Korean city of Gyeongju, flying back to Washington directly after a meeting with Xi.

The two leaders' talks yielded a one-year deal to partially roll back trade and technology controls that had spiked tension between the world's two biggest economies.

While advanced chips made by California-based Nvidia are central to the AI boom, China-based developer DeepSeek has rolled out lower-cost models taken up by Beijing in a push for what it calls "algorithmic sovereignty".

Xi also urged Apec to promote the "free circulation" of green technologies, a cluster of industries from batteries to solar panels that China dominates.

Apec members approved a joint declaration and pacts on AI and the challenge of ageing populations at the meeting.

China will host the 2026 Apec summit in Shenzhen, a major hub for manufacturing, from robotics to electric car production. Xi said the city of nearly 18 million had been a fishing village until it boomed as one of China's first special economic zones in the 1980s.—Reuters

PEOPLE walk in the grounds of the Grand Egyptian Museum prior to its opening in Giza, on the southwestern outskirts of Cairo.—AFP

Israel strikes Gaza, claims returned bodies 'not of prisoners'

- Hamas insists Tel Aviv declined offer to provide samples for testing
- Says warships opened fire towards shores of Khan Yunis

JERUSALEM: Israel claimed on Saturday that three bodies it received from Gaza the night before were not prisoners held in the Palestinian territory, as a Hamas security source reported fresh strikes in the south.

Despite occasional flare-ups, a fragile truce has been holding in Gaza since Oct 10, based on a US-brokered deal centred on the return of all Israeli prisoners, both living and dead.

Israel's military told AFP that a forensic analysis revealed that three bodies it received via the Red Cross on Friday were not those of any of the deceased captives still to be handed over as part of the ceasefire deal.

Hamas's armed wing said on Saturday that it had handed over bodies it had not positively identified, saying that Israel had declined its offer to provide samples for testing and "demanded the bodies for examination".

"We handed them over to pre-empt any enemy claims," the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades said.

After the start of the truce, Hamas returned the 20 surviving prisoners still in its custody and began the process of returning the remains of the dead.

Of the 17 bodies returned since the start of the ceasefire, 15 were Israelis, one was Thai and one was Nepalese.

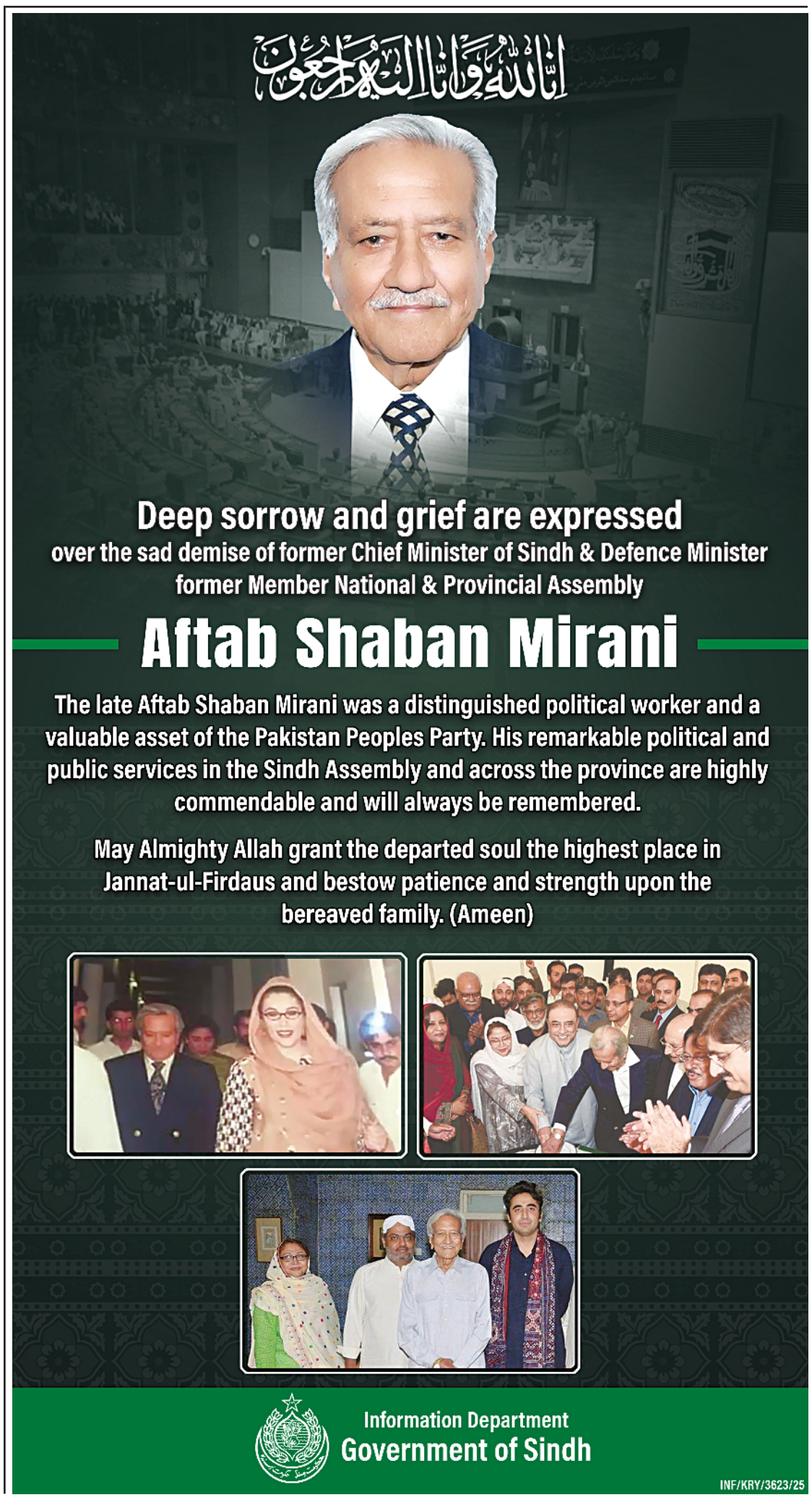
Israel has accused Hamas of not returning the dead prisoners quickly enough, but the Palestinian group says it will take time to locate remains buried in Gaza's ruins.

In its statement on Saturday, the Al-Qassam Brigades called on mediators and the Red Cross to provide the "necessary equipment and personnel to work on recovering all the bodies simultaneously".

Hamas and Israel, meanwhile, have traded accusations of breaking the ceasefire.

A Hamas security source told AFP on Saturday that Israel had carried out several air strikes in the south at dawn, and that "warships opened fire towards the shores of Khan Yunis".

Earlier in the week, the Israeli military launched its deadliest night of bombing since the truce after one of its soldiers was killed in south Gaza, with the territory's civil defence agency reporting more than 100 people killed.—AFP


انا للہ وانا الیہ راجعون
Deep sorrow and grief are expressed
over the sad demise of former Chief Minister of Sindh & Defence Minister
former Member National & Provincial Assembly
Aftab Shaban Mirani
The late Aftab Shaban Mirani was a distinguished political worker and a valuable asset of the Pakistan Peoples Party. His remarkable political and public services in the Sindh Assembly and across the province are highly commendable and will always be remembered.
May Almighty Allah grant the departed soul the highest place in Jannat-ul-Firdaus and bestow patience and strength upon the bereaved family. (Ameen)
Information Department
Government of Sindh
INF/KRY/3623/25

Printed at Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Khalil Mohsin and published for Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Shahjahan at Haroon House, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road, Karachi. EDITOR: ZAFFAR ABBAS